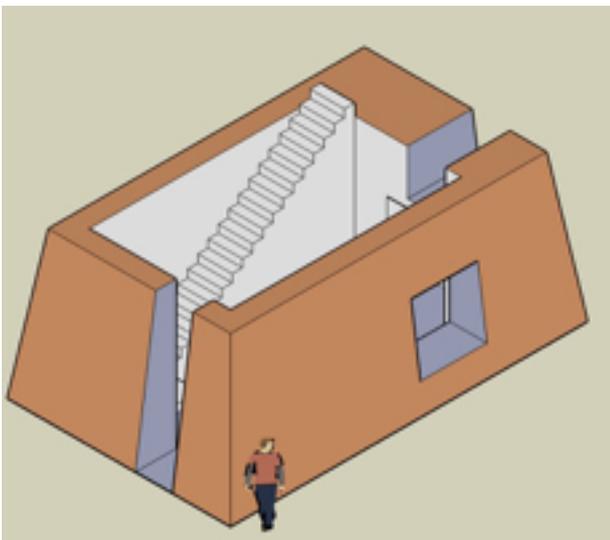STACKING SYSTEMS.
An interactive play

Different Kinds of Architectural Systems

In the book "Conversations with Form" play 7 is about stacking systems one upon another. The difference between 'primary' and 'secondary' systems relates to the distinction between 'heavy' and 'light' systems, the former supporting the latter.

On pages 178-179 of the same book reference is made to Kenneth Frampton's proposal to distinguish between light "Tectonic" and heavy "Stereotomic" forms: for instance a tree and a stone.

Different Kinds of Architectural Systems

## An interactive Stacking Play (SP1)

The distinction between two kinds of architectural systems lends itself to an interactive design play, the most straightforward form might be as follows:

Player A designs a heavy first form and passes it on to friends B and C, asking them to design a second system on top of it.

B and C select in mutual consensus the material or the kind of subsystem they personally will work with; either to ensure their choices are significantly different, or to ensure they will work with the same subsystem or material.

Having completed their designs they discuss what can be learned from the experience and from a comparison of the two designs. Among other things, they may discuss the difficulties that design A caused and how it could be adjusted to make the second phase easier and, most importantly, how the second system lives in harmony with the first one: making the whole more than the sum of the parts.

Next, it is player B's turn to submit a heavy form and for A and C to stack a second system on top of it. And so on.
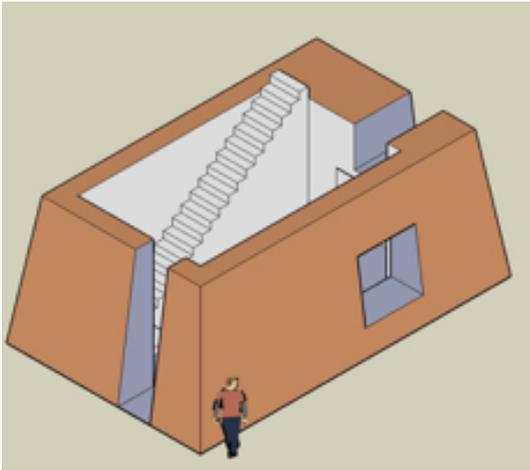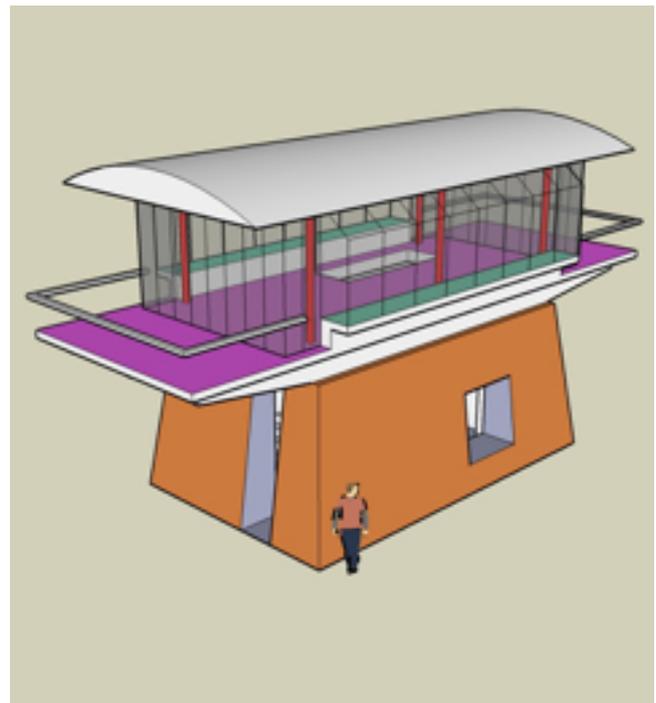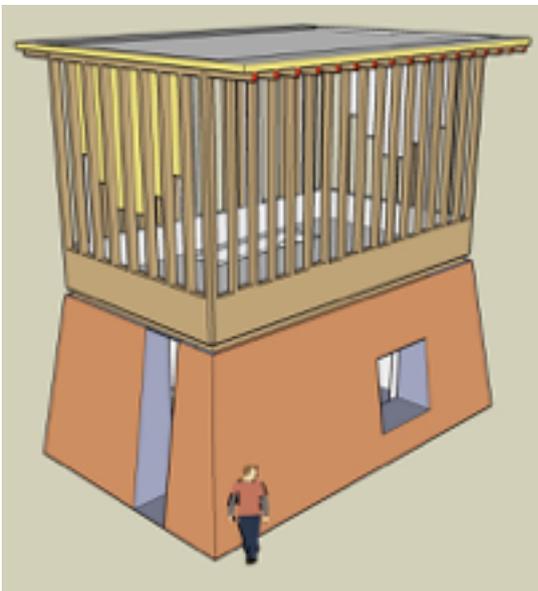
Example of play
Player A produces the heavy form as shown here. B selects to work in wood, C will work with metal components.

Which one do you find most satisfactory and why?

How would you do it?

Comments and questions

The play would gain as a design challenge if players B and C would be asked to do two different solutions each.

How would you make a second light form on this heavy form that is still in the same family with the first one, but nevertheless recognisably different. The way two siblings may differ. Same theme, different mood?

How would you make a variant of your first light form that is s still family with the first design but relates to the heavy form in a significantly different way?

Could you do a second light form with the same <u>material</u> but in an entirely different way?

Variations on the first play

As with all plays, many variants and alternatives are possible.

There are alternatives of procedure.
For instance:
** All players do a first heavy form and pass it on to the a next player for the light form, receiving the heavy form from a third player. Or, when just two players play, they swap their heavy forms.
** Doing a second light form in another way as suggested above also counts as a procedural variant.
** Organise different ways to de-brief the results. For instance, invite a third party to join the discussion. Ask someone to chair the de-briefing meeting, etc.

**There are alternatives of heavy forms setting different constraints**
for instance**:**
** The given example above clearly has a self contained form, limited in size.
** the heavy first form could be of a certain larger size.
** Its footprint could not be a single rectangle but - although still orthogonal - be more complex and a-symmetrical.
** The top surface of the heavy first form may vary in height.
** The heavy form is not a single shape but a field: an arrangement of discreet smaller forms like walls, columns, piers etc.
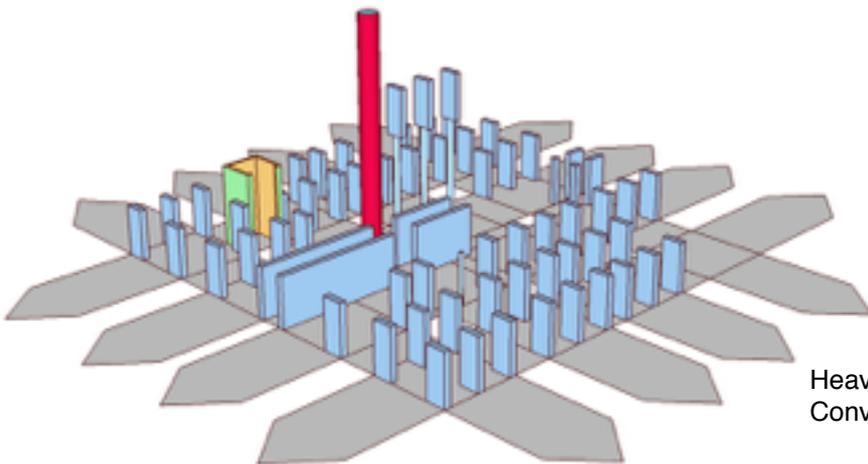
Heavy form, see sample play 7.1 in Conversations with Form

Different roles for players

You could push the interactive nature of the play further by, for instance, having player A make an extensive heavy first form arrangement on which both players B and C will add simultaneously their chosen systems on a predetermined part of the first form, meeting one another somewhere half way. To get a reasonably coherent result the players should think of a few thematic aspects to be applied by both to assure that the two light designs have some shared aspects in spite of working with different light systems.

By the same token you may think of a extensive heavy first form that is the result of two designers sharing the same heavy system…….and so on.

Introducing an outside party

Another way of setting up alternative plays is by introducing other players who do not design but who set constraints or define roles.

For instance a fourth person D might decide what architectural systems will be deployed. Such a system could be defined loosely by showing a form done with it. Or by referring to an example of it applied in the real world.

Another way in which player D might set the stage for the play , so to speak,could be by specification of the result: the size of the heavy system's footprint, for instance, or the height of the final combined result or of the individual systems. One can also think of setting rules for the interface between light and heavy forms. Points in a grid, for instance where they must meet…..
and so on

Organising tools

Grids and zones can offer coordination between the two systems.
A grid can offer a modular rhythm for the placement and dimensioning of both heavy and light systems. Rules can be followed on how system parts are positioned relative to grid modules.
In addition, zones make areas for the positioning of parts of both systems. For instance there can be zones in which the two systems meet and others where only one system is found. A composition of zones together with conventions of placement produces the abstract spatial structure that both systems have in common.

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